

Report of the Board of Scientific Advisors of
the Roche Institute of Molecular Biology, May 14-16, 1981

Postdoctoral students.

The magnitude of their problems did not seem great and we determined that they were superimposed on a feeling of well being. We noted a complaint amongst some of the 3rd floor students that communication is not perfect, that it is not always easy to learn what neighbors are doing. We pass on this information not being able to fully judge its significance.

These students reflect some of the uncertainties held by other postdoctoral fellows around the country. Despite the recombinant DNA boom, some of them are having problems getting jobs. Once again we could not assess how general this problem might be.

A recurring problem that needs continuing attention is the difficulty in finding housing, especially for foreign fellows.

Although there has been a recent increase in their salaries, we recommend periodic evaluations made necessary by inflation. There is also a problem with money for meetings. \$550 will not cover costs of an average trip nowadays. This budgetary line item devoted to travel is a source of complaint from the postdoctoral fellows and some faculty. There also seems to be some confusion among the fellows as to whether the allotted funds are restricted to one meeting only per year, or whether they may be allowed (upon agreement by lab chief) to attend more than one.

Faculty.

Our luncheon meeting with the junior faculty found them to be highly motivated and enthusiastic. It is paradoxical that they seemed

more aware of the Institution's advantages than some of the more senior faculty. This may reflect the era in which they had to find their jobs.

The Senate meeting produced a series of minor complaints with an underlying cause -- imperfect communication. Despite joint meetings, decisions of the Executive Board are not always clear to the Senate. Decisions are made, policies and procedures are changed without conferring with the Senate. There is no debate about who is boss, but too much arbitrary decision making breeds insecurity. Frank interchange between the Staff and Executive Board would certainly moderate this problem. Many of the questions raised at our meeting with the Senate last year had been dealt with by the Executive Board to the satisfaction of the Senate members. Nevertheless, we recommend that, wherever possible, changes that affect the Staff be explained in detail to them - perhaps at Senate meetings. Where it is practical and desirable, suggestions of Senate members be solicited and considered in policy making.

Tenure, Promotions and Appointments.

The Advisory Board believes that it is time that the Institution review its mechanism for change. There are 21 tenured faculty out of a total of 29. A search is underway for two new assistant members. At this rate there will be no junior positions to fill in ten years because most of the faculty will not retire for 20-30 additional years. Research institutions are vulnerable to stagnation because few scientists can remain productive for their entire working career. On the whole, research institutions are designed for young people. A place such as Roche is uniquely suited to support scientists who wish to do very different kinds of things, or who change fields of research.

Retraining and change should be emphasized.

We noted that three of the six junior faculty work for senior faculty members. In fact, there are several tenured members who really work for another faculty member. The key question is whether these individuals could carry out independent research if their "boss" left. If the answer is no, then these scientists represent a different kind of appointment, one that does not add to the creativity of the institution.

Since the tenure and promotion protocol was devised originally by the Executive Board, it can be reviewed and, if so desired, changed by the same Board. The Advisory Board unanimously recommends that the Executive Board or the Institute as a whole review the procedure for tenure, promotions and appointments with an eye toward the long term health and vitality of the Institute. Turnover and youth are essential ingredients in successful science. A renewal is necessary.

Current State of the Institution

We find that the Institution is currently in fine health with research of the highest quality being conducted. In our minds, the Institution represents a highly successful experiment. Due to the foresight of John Burns, Sid Udenfriend, and the Executive Board of the Institute, the Institute has maintained its original character by devoting its effort to fundamental nondirected research. The occasional spin-off of projects with commercial value has had the salutary affect of strengthening the Institute in the eyes of the Company. The Company has not forced practical problems on the Institute, enabling the Institute to remain an academically oriented research establishment which has been invaluable in recruiting

postdoctorals, and staff. Perturbations caused by interferon research and the problems that surrounded it last year seem to have been resolved favorably. Nowadays, Universities have shown a heavy hand in dealing with the commercialization of biology. They would have benefited from a review of Roche's success.

The V.D. Mattia Award.

Julius Adler will be the V.D. Mattia Lecturer for 1981.

Respectfully submitted,

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Herman Eisen
Norman Kirshner
Joshua Lederberg
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Mary Jane Osborn